

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
Case File No.: AA-083328 (2850)  
AK-040-02-EA-007

Applicant: Matanuska Electric Association, Inc.  
Post Office Box 2929  
Palmer, Alaska 99645

Type of Action: Right-of-Way Grant

Location: Seward Meridian, Alaska  
T. 14 N., R. 2 W.,  
Sec. 2, SW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>SW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>SW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>,  
Sec. 3, S<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>S<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>,  
Sec. 10, N<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>NE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>,  
Sec. 11, N<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>N<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>

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Realty Specialist

Preparing Office: Bureau of Land Management  
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6881 Abbott Loop Road  
Anchorage, Alaska 99507-2599

Date: December 20, 2001

I. INTRODUCTION

Matanuska Electric Association, Inc. (MEA) has applied for a right-of-way (ROW) grant to install and operate a single phase 7.2 kV electrical distribution line on federal land within the Fort Richardson military reservation. MEA is technically and financially able to construct, operate, maintain and terminate the proposed line. The workforce will consist of no more than a three person crew during the initial clearing and line construction. The safety requirements will be in accordance with OSHA, MEA's Safety Manual, and the National Electrical Safety Code (NESC) standards. The fire control will be in accordance with MEA's safety standards and as dictated by the Department of Army. The Army's Fire Department personnel will be available if needed.

The existing components to this Proposed Action were authorized under ROW AA-40060 consisting of facilities associated with an overhead 7.2/12.5 kV distribution line. This ROW grant was amended on November 14, 1984, to allow an overhead extension along the Artillery Road to the existing Alaska Power Authority transmission line on Fort Richardson. This proposed underground line will commence at the northwesterly terminus of ROW AA-40060 and continue west parallel with Artillery Road. Future components consist of the proposed buried distribution line and a pad-mounted transformer at each end of it. The transformer at the west end will be on Alaska Railroad property. No new substations are planned. The existing substation for this line is located in downtown Eagle River.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

The purpose and need of the Proposed Action is to provide electric power to operate the Alaska Railroad track switches and future signaling devices for the Artillery Road railroad crossing on Fort Richardson.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

The lands are within the boundary of the Alaska Southcentral Planning Area, Management Framework Plan (MFP), dated March 1980.

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses:

The lands have been withdrawn for military purposes. A non-objection letter has been received from Fort Richardson for this Proposed Action. Only third party non-military uses are under the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) jurisdiction.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is for MEA to bury a single phase 7.2 kV electrical

distribution line across federal lands. The specific location is T. 14 N., R. 2 W., Section 2, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ ; Section 3, S $\frac{1}{2}$ S $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ ; Section 10, N $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ ; and Section 11, N $\frac{1}{2}$ N $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , Seward Meridian, Alaska (see attached map). This electric line is part of the Alaska Railroad's Anchorage to Wasilla track realignment project and will service the automated switches and signaling devices near the Artillery Road, Alaska railroad crossing on Fort Richardson. The ROW will encompass 1.7 acres (length 3,703 feet, width 20 feet). The 7.2 kV electric line will be made out of aluminum and will be wrapped, then encased in material similar to two inch PVC conduit. The line will be buried four feet below the ground surface, using either a track or rubber tire mounted excavator for digging the trench. A small dozer will be used to backfill the trench. MEA plans to revegetate the disturbed area as required by BLM's standards (see attached stipulations).

The concurrence from the Army specifies that the buried line will not be closer than 10 feet or further than 20 feet from the Artillery Road.

Construction of the line will begin after the spring thaw of 2002. The construction duration is estimated to be one week.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative would be to deny MEA's application for construction of the underground electric distribution line.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

The following critical elements of the human environment were not present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action:

Air Quality  
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern  
Environmental Justice  
Farmlands (Prime or Unique)  
Floodplains  
Native American Religious Concerns  
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid  
Water Quality, Surface/Ground  
Wild and Scenic Rivers  
Wilderness

1. Cultural Resources:

No cultural resources are known or expected for the area of potential effect. The standard ROW stipulation will state that work will stop if any unexpected cultural or paleontological resources are encountered until the authorized officer can determine appropriate action. With this stipulation in place, no further consultation is necessary under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

2. Subsistence - ANILCA, Section 810:

The Proposed Action occurs on Federal Public Lands as defined in ANILCA and falls under the regulatory authority of the Federal Subsistence Board. The Fort Richardson Management area is currently closed to the subsistence taking of wildlife as stated by the Subsistence Regulations for the Harvest of Wildlife on federal public lands in Alaska. This action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses, decrease the abundance of subsistence resources, alter the distribution of subsistence resources, or limit subsistence users' access from currently existing conditions. No further analysis is necessary at this time.

3. Threatened or Endangered Species:

The impact of the Proposed Action and Alternatives on threatened and endangered plants and animals and their habitats has been evaluated in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. Based on currently available information, the Proposed Action would not affect any threatened or endangered species or their habitats. There are no rare or sensitive plant species known to occur in this project area. Therefore, no consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considered necessary pursuant to Section 7 of the Act and none will be undertaken.

B. Wildlife:

The site of the Proposed Action and surrounding area supports a variety of animal species. The resident populations include moose, porcupine, snowshoe hare, rodents and at least 40 species of resident and migrant land birds. Non-resident species that have been seen include fox, coyote, wolf, lynx, brown bear and black bear. These animals move through the area, probably from the Chugach Mountains during seasonal changes and heavy snowfall. Many migrant birds, pass through the area during spring and fall migration, including several raptors and many neo-tropical species. Shrub and forest habitats provide nesting habitat for land birds and raptors particularly bald eagles. There is one species of amphibian, the wood frog, that occurs in the area.

C. Vegetation:

The area is within the Cook Inlet and Susitna Lowlands major land resource area. The vegetation in the area consists of alder and cottonwoods, interspersed with thick patches of alder and willow. Vegetation in and around the project area has a history of disturbance from activities associated with the road ROW and military operations.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Invasive, Non-native Species:

There is a low potential for invasive plant species to invade the area disturbed during construction of the powerline. Potential seed sources for invasive plant species may occur on the surrounding military facilities.

b. Wetlands/Riparian Zones:

The overall impacts on the integrity of the vegetation within the project area are expected to be minimal.

2. Vegetation:

Most of the impacts would be from clearing of vegetation for passage of the construction equipment, trampling and the trench. The areas with soil disturbance would likely recolonize the first few years with a high percentage of weeds. Much of the adjacent areas are at different successional stages due to human influences. Each area would progress to a climax community in due time, if no other impacts would occur. The overall impacts on the integrity of the vegetation within the project area are expected to be minimal.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no impacts.

C. Residual and Cumulative Impacts:

No residual or cumulative impacts will occur from this action.

D. Mitigation Measures:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Invasive, Non-native Species:

The site should be monitored for weeds until a desirable vegetation

species are established and if infestations occur, they should be manually removed.

2. Vegetation:

Equipment, gravel and other materials brought on-site must be free of weed sources. Weed infestation can be minimized through monitoring and removal. The area disturbed for clearing of vegetation to install the line will be revegetated with native plant species. Only native species shall be used for revegetation and include a mixture of the following:

35% Bering Hairgrass (*Deschampsia beringensis*)  
35% Arctared fescue  
30% Greuning alpine bluegrass (*Poa alpina*)

Seeded at 44 pounds per acre

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. List of Preparers:

Dorothy Bonds - Realty Specialist  
Donna Redding - Archaeologist  
Jeff Denton - Subsistence Coordinator  
Bruce Seppi - Wildlife Biologist  
Debbie Blank - Botanist